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Language Planning in Cameroon:
Toward a Trilingual Education System*

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1. Introduction

Language planning is one of the major concerns of today's developing nations. It is even a greater concern to African countries, due to the multiplicity and diversity of the languages spoken in these countries. The complexity of such language problems has prompted different linguists, organizations, and communities to take steps toward finding practical solutions to these problems, in accordance with the cultural, educational, economic, political, and social evolution of specific African countries.

The first concern of this paper will be the historical development of the language policy in Cameroon since its independence in 1960. The second will be an attempt to sketch a formal trilingual education plan for the country and make some practical suggestions for its implementation. The paper is divided into seven continuous sections.

Section 2 outlines the pre-independence language heritage in terms of the official and vernacular languages. Section 3 presents the policy of official bilingualism (French and English), various ways of implementing this policy, and some of the results obtained. In section 4, the first steps toward a trilingual education system are presented along with various ways of developing vernacular language literacy. Section 5 is a presentation of the language situation in Cameroon as it appears today. Here, the recent, major suggestions for the planning process are presented along with some evaluative comments. In section 6 a functional classification of Cameroon languages is proposed. The classification is based on the three major levels of administrative stratification in the country. At the national level, official and eventual national languages are considered. At the provincial and interprovincial level, provincial languages are functionally defined. Finally, at the local level, covering linguistic areas up to the administrative division, mother tongues are classified into two groups MT₁ and MT₂. Section 7 sketches a blue-print for a trilingual education system in Cameroon. Section 8 outlines the advantages of the proposal presented in this paper.

It has long been a commonplace to refer to the United Republic of Cameroon as "Africa in miniature". Indeed, there is much geographical, demographic, cultural, historical, and linguistic evidence to support such a flattering, neat name. The linguistic evidence will become apparent as we proceed in this paper.

Cameroon has an area of 475,000 square kilometers (or about 200,000 square miles), and the country's constantly increasing population was estimated at 6.1 million in 1972. It is divided into seven administrative provinces and 39 divisions (or departments). The number of languages spoken within this relatively limited area is somewhere between 200 and 250. At the present time, there is no absolutely reliable source for determining the exact number of languages spoken in the country. However, among the existing standard sources, I have used both linguistic and ethnological inventories; namely Welmers' "Checklist of African language and dialect names" (1971) and LeVine's ethnic group estimation (1970). LeVine shows that there are approximately 136 ethnic groups in the former Eastern Cameroon ('francophone' or French speaking) and 65 such groups in the former Western Cameroon ('anglophone' or English speaking). This makes a total of 201 ethnic groups in The United Republic of Cameroon. On the other hand, Welmers' overall checklist of African language and dialect names provides an inventory of 158 distinct language names for Cameroon alone. It also provides an array of distinct dialects for most of the languages listed and there is much evidence from more recent studies showing that some of these dialects are actually separate languages. However, the difficult problem of determining the boundary between languages and dialect remains unsolved in Cameroon. I shall suggest that this particular problem be more carefully dealt with within a general official language planning process for the country. It would then be possible to consider the degree of mutual intelligibility as one of the important criteria in establishing the boundary between languages and dialects.

Turning now to the generic grouping of the Cameroon languages, we find that among the four major-language groups established by Greenberg for the whole of Africa, three are represented in Cameroon. In his first group (Congo-Korodofanian), the Bantu family is represented by almost all the languages spoken in the southern and western parts of the country. Also, in the North, the West Atlantic family is represented by a 'major' language such as Fulfulde. The second group, Nilo-Saharan, is represented in Cameroon by an important language such as Kanuri which is also spoken in Nigeria, Niger, and Chad. In the third group, Afro-Asiatic, the Semitic family is represented by classical Arabic as used in Koranic schools. Santerre (1969), in his attempt to evaluate the percentage of the northern population which knows Arabic quotes *The Misoencam* (1960-61) survey which established that some 10% of the male adults can read and write Arabic. The general literature on the use of classical Arabic in Cameroon shows that, although this is not a Cameroon vernacular language, it will remain an important religious and educational language for the Moslem population of the country. In view of this importance of Arabic, studies point out the necessity of devising more adequate teaching methods for the Koranic schools. Greenberg's third group is also widely represented in Cameroon by languages belonging to the Chadic family, such as Hausa, Bura, Daba, Musei, and Njai. Most of the Cameroon Chadic languages are also spoken in neighboring

countries such as Nigeria, Chad, and Central African Republic. Among these languages, Hausa stands out as a regional African lingua franca spoken by over 25 million people.

2. Pre-Independence linguistic legacy

From the linguistic point of view, almost every independent African country has some pre-independence language legacy to deal with. The literature on this legacy presents two general pre-independence bases underlying the post-independence language policies, namely those of French and British colonial governments. I will only point out the major linguistic difference between these two policies, since ideologically speaking they were not radically different. The British Indirect Rule allowed the use of vernacular languages as a medium of instruction in the first years of primary schools. The switch to English was to take place at the upper level of primary school and continue throughout the secondary school and the university. On the other hand, the French Assimilation Policy did not allow the use of vernacular languages in school even as subjects of instruction, except for missionary schools as it will be shown shortly. In the particular case of Cameroon, which has inherited both systems since its independence in 1960 and reunification in 1961, the French legacy has been generalized to apply to the anglophone part of the country. This means that English has become the medium of instruction in the anglophone Cameroon, starting from the first year of primary school as is the case for the francophone areas. These two policies had almost the same result in the determination of official languages of independent African countries except in the case of Cameroon as it will become apparent in the following section. English became at least the first official language of former British territories and French played the same role in former French territories.

However, these were formal policies as distinct from informal language policies which were carried out by Missionaries. William Welmers has shown that, although the missionaries did not overtly claim to have their own language policy, they did actually have one for religious purposes. This consisted in developing vernacular language programs as means for reaching their spiritual goals. Thus, they taught vernacular languages in their own primary schools. Wherever it was possible to use a language such as pidgin English for religious purposes, they did not hesitate to do so. Also, if one vernacular language could be used as a union language for a given linguistic area, they developed teaching materials in that language so that the speakers of related languages could easily learn it. In Cameroon, this was the case of Bangangte in the Bamileke area. However, the result of this particular case was not successful. But the policy was successful when applied to languages such as Douala, Bali, and Ewondo.

From the practical point of view, the missionary policy, which was tolerated to some extent in countries under the French rule, has been consistently extended beyond their purely religious borders to cover educational purposes. In Cameroon, vernacular

language programs such as the Nufi program, The College Libermann, and recently secondary school programs, constitute clear examples of this extension. Now, it is no longer accurate to call these programs missionary programs, since, although they still have their bases around the 'missions', they are supported and run by the local communities.

3. The policy of official bilingualism

In October 1961, The Republic of Cameroon and the former Southern British Cameroon merged together to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon (which has become The United Republic of Cameroon since May 1972). This was the period when most African countries were achieving independence. Linguistically, independence meant that each free country would make its own decision regarding the language, or languages, which would be "official". While almost all newly-independent African countries recognized either French or English as their official languages, the Federal Republic of Cameroon found itself with the necessity of recognizing both of them as its official languages. In this respect, the Constitution states that: "The official languages of the Federal Republic of Cameroon shall be French and English".

Since then the Government has put up several programs for the implementation of this bilingual policy. I shall point out four of these: namely, the bilingual secondary schools, the cultural and linguistic centers, the English and French language teaching programs by radio, and, more recently, the bilingual primary schools.

3.1. Bilingual secondary schools. Since the early 60's four bilingual secondary schools have been opened in Cameroon in Yaounde, Buea, Mamfe, and recently Bonaberi (Douala). These schools aim at using both French and English as alternating media of instruction. Here students are linguistically best prepared for higher education at the bilingual University of Yaounde, which is the only university in Africa where, in principle, lectures may be given in either French or English. Notice that the University is bilingual from the perspective of the students, while from the perspective of the lecturers, it is not. Another objective of the bilingual secondary schools is obviously to prepare students for jobs requiring an equal mastery of both French and English. However, the job prospects of the country show that such jobs are very limited, with the exception, of course, of teaching jobs.

Besides the bilingual secondary schools, all other secondary schools in the country are required to teach English as a second language in the francophone area and French as a second language in the anglophone area. However, the teaching methods need serious improvements in order for this program to produce better results.

3.2. Cultural and linguistic centers. In 1962, the first cultural and linguistic center was established in Yaounde. It was designed to help citizens improve their French or English, in addition to having other cultural goals. As far as bilingualism is concerned, it could help people whose professions required knowledge of both

French and English, but who spoke only one of these languages, to acquire the second language easily. In 1968, proposals were made for the establishment of similar centers in Douala, Buea, and other major cities of the country. It is clear that such centers are useful only for a minority of citizens living in these cities. These centers are also too expensive due to the audio-visual equipment deemed necessary to run them.

3.3. Bilingualism by radio. Another practical way of implementing the bilingual policy in Cameroon has been to develop French and English teaching programs by radio, respectively, in the anglophone and francophone parts of the country. In October 1967, the "Le Français par la Radio" (Prevost 1969) program started in the then West Cameroon. Its purpose was to help English or pidgin-English speakers who could afford a radio learn or improve their French. A similar program, "L'Anglais chez vous", was later developed for the francophone radio owners. Ideally speaking, one may say that any Cameroonian who can afford a radio set can learn to improve his or her French or English, no matter where he or she lives. However, the fact that people do not enroll in such programs unless they have some economic, social, or political motivations for doing so. It is clearly not the case that the present socio-economic situation of Cameroon offers enough of this motivation.

3.4. Bilingual primary schools. Recently, bilingual education has been introduced into the primary school system in Cameroon. It is still too early to attempt to evaluate this step. However, one may notice that not all primary schools can carry on a bilingual program since there are not enough bilingual teachers and it is not likely that there will soon be enough of them unless a special training program is set up for this purpose. It is important to try to understand the basic motivation behind this step in order to perceive the development of Cameroon's education system and the role of language in this system. In his article, "A case for early bilingualism", Dr. Fonlon (1969) pleaded for the introduction of bilingualism into the primary school system in the following terms: "The teaching of English and French together here in Cameroon, should start right from the very first day that the child takes his seat in the infant school". The author presents all possible historical, psychological, and educational evidence in support of his proposal. He uses all this evidence to show that it is easier for children to acquire second and third languages than it is for adults, which is true to a very large extent. Today, there is no doubt that the recent development of early bilingualism in Cameroon conforms to Dr. Fonlon's suggestions. It is also true to some extent that it conforms to his outline of the place that language should occupy in the Cameroon curriculum and within the general education system of the country. Thus, according to him, "the principal pre-occupation of primary school...should be language, that of secondary school, general knowledge, that of higher school, introduction to specialization, and that of the university, specialization". There is no major objection to Dr.

Fonlon's proposals except for two things that will become apparent in this paper. The first is that there seems to be no strong reason for maintaining in the school system a 'higher school' between the secondary school and the university. The second is that if language is to be the primary concern of the primary school, then there is no reason for not including the vernacular languages in the curriculum at this level. The basic contention of this paper is that by introducing the vernacular languages at this level, the education system of the country would reflect its 'de facto' minimal trilingualism that the present multilingual situation imposes upon each Cameroon student.

At this stage, a different official language program in Cameroon should be pointed out, because of its importance in the general planning process being proposed in this paper. It is an adult literacy program in French called 'Ecole sous l'arbre'. This program was developed in the early 60's and was carried out in cities as well as in the rural areas. However, it has not been successful at all, simply because it was in fact a double program, namely a foreign language program and a literacy program. I would like to suggest that vernacular languages be substituted for French in this same program and that this process be linked to the introduction of vernacular languages in the school curriculum. The same thing can be done in place of the adult education program in English which was operative in the anglophone area and which had to stop because of economic and other reasons. My contention is that such an adult literacy program would be faster, cheaper, more effective, and would conform to the general cultural and socio-economic evolution of the country.

4. Toward a trilingual education system

In his proposal for an early bilingualism in Cameroon, Dr. Fonlon wrote:

I must confess that the expression, Cameroon bilingualism, is a misnomer. It would be more correct to speak of Cameroon trilingualism, because, even before the Cameroon child comes to school to learn English and French, he should have already learnt his own native language.

This is obviously what actually happens to almost all Cameroon children, except for those who come from those very rare elite families where either English or French is used to the extent of becoming the mother tongue of the children. Thus, the problem is not that the Children should learn their mother tongues, since this happens naturally anyway, but that they should become literate in either their mother tongues or a closely related vernacular language. There is no point in talking about trilingual education in Cameroon if this does not mean developing fluency and reading and writing skills in at least three languages, including where possible each individual's mother tongue and the two official languages. In this section, I shall try to show that such trilingualism does exist in Cameroon and that it is actually

becoming a primary goal of many educators. I shall present this trend at three levels; namely the individual, local, and national levels. This paper, besides being an objective presentation of facts, is intended as a proposal for a trilingual education system beneficial not only to Cameroon, but also to other African countries which must deal with two official languages and several mother tongues (MT).

At the individual level, a few Cameroonians have succeeded in becoming trilingual, that is, fluent and literate in their mother tongues, French, and English. These are mostly well-motivated students and other educated people. What is noteworthy at this level is the amount of self-training these people go through in order to develop vernacular literacy skills. Another important consideration is that, after somebody has been able to read and write in his MT, he would be more willing to help other speakers of his MT do the same thing. But this effort does not go very far without a supporting institution of some sort. The role of religious institutions in this process should not be underestimated.

This leads us to the role of the local level. Here, there are two kinds of institutions that make trilingualism possible. First, there are local literacy programs in vernacular languages, most of which originally developed in the 'missions' and later became autonomous. A typical example of this is the Nufi program, which, during the course of more than fifteen years under the leadership of Abbé Tchamda and others, has developed its own schools throughout the country and abroad (for example, in France), using the Fe'Fei language. Since 1961, more than 3,000 people have graduated from the Nufi schools and have received their diplomas (certificates) (Datchou 1974). The program has its own publishing services as well as a journal. Many of the Nufi graduates have also become fluent and literate in both French and English through the formal Cameroon bilingual education system. This will be true for any other local vernacular literacy program which is developed in the future. Some of these are being developed in other Bamileke languages such as Banjun, Bangangte, and Dschang. Other Cameroon languages such as Ewondo, Bassa, Douala, etc. have their own programs. All these are local self-supporting programs, resulting in a kind of informal education system. This makes literary trilingualism in Cameroon a reality rather than a speculation. That the term 'local' is used to refer to them does not mean that they are limited geographically. In fact, they originate in the home town of the language concerned and spread to wherever its native speakers can be collectively reached.

A second type of local program that makes trilingualism possible is carried out by private schools which have some vernacular languages in their curricula. For example, in the Northern part of the country, classical Arabic is taught in Koranic schools. Here, Santerre (1969) found that the best thing to do would be to introduce Fulfulde which is widely spoken in the north into the primary schools as the medium of instruction. Then, either French or Arabic would be progressively taught depending on the specific area where a school is situated. However, it appears that Fulfulde would not be easily accepted in the Kirdi (non-Moslem) primary schools if

some Kirdi languages are not already introduced into those schools. It seems to me that, as a general rule, if more vernacular languages are introduced into the school system in Cameroon, then less opposition will be raised against eventual provincial languages, and by the same token national unity will be preserved.

In the south, many private secondary schools, under the leadership of the College Libermann in Douala, have introduced some vernacular languages into their curricula. A few of these are: The College Libermann itself, College de la Retraite in Yaounde, St. Paul in Bafang, Kamga in Banjun, and St. Laurant in Bafou. Notice that the languages being introduced in these schools are those which have already reached some degree of development through local programs. In other words, the collaboration between the local community and the school is already effective at this level. It is expected that in the near future, vernacular languages taught in secondary schools will be given at the B.E.P.C. (Brevé d'études du premier cycle) Examination to replace the third languages such as German, Latin, and Spanish. Suggestions have even been made for the replacement of these languages by vernaculars in the secondary school curriculum. The main argument in support of this proposal is that these languages are less relevant to the socio-economic needs of the country than are the vernacular languages.

At the national level, there are two ways of dealing with vernacular languages which support our contention that there is a de facto trilingual education system operating in Cameroon. First, since the late 1960's there have been annual workshops and seminars on vernacular languages organized either at the University of Yaounde or at College Libermann in Douala. The next section of this paper will describe these seminars in more detail because of their importance in the development of the official language policy of the country. The second way of making trilingualism possible at the national level is found in the University of Yaounde. Here, elective courses are offered in the structure and orthographic systems of vernacular languages such as Fulfulde, Bassa, Douala, Ewondo, Fe'fe', and Banjun. These courses are compulsory for students who have a minor in linguistics. Here, courses in vernacular languages fulfill a part of the applied linguistic requirement. Students involved in these courses necessarily develop reading and writing skills in the specific languages studied.

These facts show that in Cameroon, there are solid bases for planning a trilingual education system. Such trilingual education planning, in its most basic form, should add vernacular languages to the two official ones. Here, the main question is 'which vernacular languages?'. After having presented additional data, I shall argue that this question can find an adequate answer within the framework of language planning which links the objectives of adult literacy programs with those of preschool and early primary school education.

5. Recent suggestions for the planning process

Two trends of language policy are observable in Cameroon. First, the formal official bilingualism which can be described

as a general top-to-bottom movement. Here, the two official languages are taught through the formal educational system as well as through appropriate government-sponsored institutions. A reverse phenomenon is also observable, namely an informal language policy working its way from the bottom upward, according to social stratification. As already stated in the previous section, this process has vernacular languages as its starting point. The most obvious result of this two-way movement is that it forces both the Cameroon government and the Cameroonians themselves to face a trilingual system. In fact, one can already perceive a practical point of merger of both trends. To illustrate this merger process, I will summarize the report of the seminar held in Douala in July 1974 under the joint sponsorship of the National Institute of Education (Institut Nationale d'Education-I.N.E.) and the Department of Applied Linguistics of the University of Yaounde. The National Institute of Education is "a research institute responsible for providing Cameroon with a harmonized and efficient education system". The theme of that seminar clearly delimits the point at hand, namely the Cameroon languages and the official languages. The seminar had been preceded on a yearly basis by several others of the same kind. An important one was held in Douala in July 1973. The proceedings of the 1973 seminar have been published as *Les Langues Africaines facteurs de developement* (African language factors of development) (College Libermann 1974).

During the two-week 1974 seminar, workshops were organized for studying selected Cameroon languages and groups of languages. Those dealt with were: Douala, Bassa, Bulu, Ewondo, and the Bamileke language group. The main purpose of the workshops was to train secondary and primary school teachers, as well as other well-motivated individuals, to use phonemic alphabet for the transcription of the specific languages studied. Each participant was enrolled in the study of his own language or a language closely related to his own. The purpose of the transcription was to reduce these languages into a more adequate writing system based on a phonemic alphabet.

An initial proposal of such an alphabet has been submitted by Professor Bot Ba Njock during a UNESCO-sponsored meeting held at the University of Yaounde in 1970. The purpose of that meeting was to devise basically a phonemic 'Bantu' alphabet for the vernacular languages of Cameroon, Chad, the Central African Republic, and Gabon. Thus, it is from this early system that the appropriate alphabet for individual languages and groups of closely related languages is being developed and used. In addition, an adapted typewriter with a special keyboard based on the present transcription system has been ordered from the Olympia Company. At the same time, in order to make more written materials in vernacular languages available at reasonable prices, a project for a special printing center is being studied at the College Libermann. The aim of such a center is to publish a variety of teaching and reading materials in as many Cameroon languages as possible. Many students, teacher, and other educated people are already involved

in developing reading and teaching materials in their respective languages. Unfortunately, these authors often lack the basic linguistic training necessary for such work. Their main weak point is in the area of syntax, since the annual seminars have already provided them with basic phonological principles to accompany their training in the orthographic systems.

One of the main outcomes of the 1974 seminar was that future seminars will be organized on a provincial basis in order to deal more adequately with the specific linguistic problems of each of the seven administrative provinces of the country. The long-term purpose of these annual seminars is to prepare secondary and primary school vernacular language teachers, as well as instructors for adult vernacular literacy programs. In other words, these seminars offer the opportunity of training diversified teaching personnel in vernacular languages, and offer the basis for preparing teaching materials. The whole effort is being made with the expectation that the Government, as soon as it is convinced of the beneficial effects of this work, will give its approval to the introduction of the Cameroon vernacular languages into the official education system. It is in this spirit that the suggestions outlined below were made at the end of the 1974 seminar. They were made on the basis of the work accomplished during the workshops, and the conferences given by several Cameroon scholars. Thus, the suggestions are grouped under specific conferences. A general proposal containing 21 suggestions was made available and I shall only present the most relevant—to the purposes of this paper—of these suggestions:

I. On Vernacular language(s) teaching policy (M. Hebga):

1. The Cameroon Government should allow the introduction of Cameroon vernacular languages into the official school system. Comment: All other suggestions will be based on this fundamental one.

2. As a first step to implementing this policy, only languages of wider communication (langues véhiculaires) should be taught in school.

3. Given the difficult problems posed by the pre-school teaching of these languages, the seminar suggests that this task be assigned to each family. Comment: One should realize how difficult it would be for a family to undertake the teaching of a Cameroon vernacular language other than that spoken in the family. It would be more appropriate to teach parents to read and write in their own languages so that in turn they can (if possible) teach their children to read and write in the same languages. The school system can take care of the teaching of the languages of wider communication.

4. Five reasons were given in support of the above suggestions: (a) the avoidance of cultural uprooting of the Cameroon youth; (b) the awakening of pride for traditional heritage, national mentality and personality; (c) the fact that only national languages can best communicate national culture and personality; (d) the awakening of a common Bantu consciousness; (3) the building of national unity.

II. On language and communication (Mbassi-Manga)

5. The multiplicity of Cameroon languages is not a real obstacle to communication among Cameroonians, since speakers of different languages can easily communicate through the languages of wider communication.

6. The real obstacle has to do with interethnic extra-linguistic conflicts. Comments: In an earlier paper (1973), Mbassi-Manga, referring to languages of wider communication as 'home languages', stated:

There are at least ten home languages in Cameroon... Cameroon therefore needs the formulation of a pedagogy of language education that will reflect its home-multilingualism. Within each language group the Cameroon child will therefore get his home education in one of the ten languages, in his place of residence, which is often not necessarily the ethnic home of his parents.

Notice that the author did not name these ten languages.

III. On national languages and national personality (M. Towa):

11. The economic argument: The seminar unanimously retained the impressive economic argument that the Cameroon Government cannot afford the cost of the perfect acquisition of the two official languages by all Cameroonians.

IV. On multilingualism and the development of the Cameroonian child: advantages and disadvantages (round table discussion):

12. Multilingualism is not good for the Cameroonian child. It slows down the logical activity of the child by complicating the establishment of his mental structures and his intellectual mechanisms. (R. Sim). Comment: This is certainly a weak argument; it is unclear and is neither psychologically founded nor observationally proven.

V. On the status of oral traditional literature in the curriculum (L-M. Ongoum):

17. The African oral literature (folk tales, proverbs, guesses, etc.) should be included in the curriculum.

18. The introduction of this literature in the educational system should resume its traditional place within the family. Then, it should continue with the teaching of Cameroon languages in public schools. Comment: As it will soon become apparent, this suggestion supports the idea that both the adult literacy programs and the children's pre-school language training should be carried out in as many mother tongues as possible. In fact, the traditional oral literature mentioned above, along with other family businesses, would provide enough motivation and content for such programs.

VI. On education and multiculturalism (P. Ngijol Ngijol):

19-20. Cameroon, through its Head of State, has chosen a multicultural policy. The educational system must, therefore, be geared toward implementing this general policy. Comment: The above assertion leads to the understanding that, in Cameroon,

language planning must be an integral part of both the cultural and educational planning activities of the country. This will be a basic assumption of the following sections.

6. Functional classification of Cameroon languages

In a highly complex multilingual nation such as Cameroon, language function becomes extremely important. Indeed, not everyone needs every language for any purpose. An effective language program must therefore rigorously specify the functions of the languages it is dealing with. If this is carefully done, then, no matter how many languages are spoken in the country, there will be a way of establishing the necessary channels of communication between different speech communities. It should be emphasized that there must be a systematic way of reaching out to the people in the rural areas in their own languages (or closely related ones) in order to offer them the possibility to fully understand and participate in the development of the country.

6.1. In his article, 'Linguistic problems of Cameroon', Professor Bot Ba Njock (1966) suggested that Cameroon be divided into major linguistic zones or regions and that regional languages be chosen for educational and adult literacy purposes. His suggestion is as follows:

La solution la plus réaliste serait de préconiser découpage de notre pays en zones linguistiques et d'utiliser dans chacune de ces zones une langue--ou dialecte de cette langue--choisie en fonction d'un certain nombre de critères: tantôt la langue la plus parlée ou la plus répandue géographiquement, tantôt simplement la mieux décrite ou celle qui paraît la plus accessible, la plus facile à apprendre, etc.

More recently a similar proposal has been made by Mr. R. Mballa Mbappe (1974), the chancellor of the University of Yaounde, who suggested the necessity of choosing the major provincial and/or interprovincial languages of wider communication for educational and adult literacy programs. He pointed out the fact that languages such as Douala, Ewondo, and Fulfulde would be the first examples of languages to be considered for those functions. Then the next step would be to reach some kind of linguistic homogenization at the national level. Mr. Mbappe states:

En tout cas la détermination d'une langue provinciale ou interprovinciale ne peut constituer qu'une étape, le but à atteindre étant l'homogénéisation linguistique au niveau national. En effet, cela apparaît comme un impératif si nous voulons rendre rentables les investissements en matière d'enseignement.

In order to show the inefficiency of the present school system, due to the use of French or English as medium of instruction

at the primary level, Mbappe points out that 40% of primary school children drop out by the time they reach the fourth year (grade). On the other hand, out of 1,000 children who enroll in the first year of primary school, only 17 will be able to continue at the secondary school level. The rest is to be added to the number of illiterates or semi-literates of the country.

Now let us take a look at the following data from the *Investor's Guide* (p. 29). In 1970, the Ministry of Planning reported that the population of Cameroon is distributed according to the following three age groups:

51% of the population between 0 and 20 years,
44% of the population between 20 and 60 years, and
5% of the population between 60 years and over.

From these statistics Mbassi-Manga (1973) was able to conclude that "at least 51% of the population of the country are potential subjects for the study of French and English." However, there is a long way between being a 'potential subject' and becoming a 'real subject'. Other relevant statistics from Datchoua's (1973) article on Cameroon local languages and national development indicate that 90% of the population is illiterate, while only 0.2% constitutes the elite class, highly fluent and literate in either French or English.

Another important consideration is that the Cameroon economy is basically agricultural, as is the case for almost all African economy. Some 74% of the population lives in the rural area, and the Government is taking all possible measures to stop the migration from rural to urban areas. One way of doing this is through the ruralization of primary schools. 'Ruralization' is the adaptation of the curriculum to the agricultural needs of the country.

All these facts lead us to the fundamental question 'who needs which languages in Cameroon, and for what purposes?'. I shall sketch a functional classification of Cameroon languages which will provide some basic elements for the answer to this question. In this classification I use three basic parameters: the functions of a language type, the approximate number of speakers, and the main area of residence of these speakers. Three language types can be functionally defined in Cameroon for the planning purpose.

1. At the national level, there are two official languages (0), French and English, which are used for administrative, educational, publication, and broadcasting purposes. Only a minority of 10% of the population is literate in either French or English. Figures on the number of those who have only a partial knowledge of French or English were not available to me during the preparation of this report, but these speakers generally live in urban areas. The prospects of an increase of those who are literate and fluent in either of the two official languages seem to be severely limited by the economic factors involved in the process of acquisition and use of these languages. Also, a very limited minority of the population is fluent and literate in both French and English and, despite the efforts being made to increase their

number, they will certainly remain a minority for a long time.

Within the education system, one must distinguish a first official language (O-1) as a medium of instruction and a second official language (O-2) as subject of instruction. Each of the two official languages plays the first or second role, depending on whether the school system is in the francophone or anglophone part of the country. This distinction of O-1 versus O-2 will be very important for the process of switching the medium of instruction in a trilingual education system.

2. At the provincial level, a provincial language (PL), when chosen, will be a vernacular language used for educational, broadcasting, limited publication and administrative purposes. Measures should then be taken to help the entire population of the province acquire competence in that language, with the exception of major cities such as Douala, Yaounde, and, perhaps, Buea and Nkongsamba. In 1970 the populations of the regions which became provinces in 1972 were estimated as follows:

Eastern Region	280,000
Coastal Region	650,000
Northern Region	1,580,000
South-Central Region	1,130,000
West Cameroon (which forms the South and North-Western provinces)	1,200,000
Western Region	1,000,000

Of course, the potential speakers of a provincial language will be people both in towns and rural areas. In a provincial school system, a PL would generally function as O-2; that is, a subject of instruction. In the long run, one would expect the provincial languages to be elevated to the level of national languages.

3. At the local level, mother tongues (MT) fulfill the essential functions of everyday life: education (in a broad sense of the word), culture, religion, business, and politics, to name just a few. I estimate that the average number of speakers of each Cameroon language (given approximately 225 languages) would be around 27,000. There is no indication that this number will decrease in the near future. Mother tongues are generally used within the family circle, and almost everywhere throughout any given linguistically-homogeneous rural community. The MT's are also the appropriate media of adult literacy programs, as well as (to be) the media of the early years of primary school instruction in the rural areas.

At the present time, it seems necessary to distinguish MT₁ as the mother tongues in which there are printed materials and literate persons from MT₂ which remain unwritten. The mother tongues which are now being taught in some private secondary schools may be included in the MT₁ group. The MT₁ appears today as the best starting point in the process of introducing vernacular languages into the primary schools and the adult literacy programs. Of course,

this does not mean that MT₂'s will be neglected since the Government should ultimately provide basic handbooks on each language in order to keep it alive, and in its proper place within the linguistic system of the country. It is clear to me that this approach would work for any other African country and would have the effect of changing the unfavorable language attitude that prevails when the issue of choosing the languages of education and adult literacy is raised.

6.2. The crucial issue now is, then, 'how to go about selecting the provincial languages.' It is necessary that careful research on this matter be done in each of the seven provinces of the Cameroon so that the people in each province may democratically, and in an informed way, participate in the selection process. This seems to be the best way of avoiding divisive opposition from the different linguistic groups within each province. However, I have serious doubts about the eventual success of such a procedure if it is not preceded by a general decision on introducing the MT₁'s into the school system. Thus, one has to expand the work being done on the development of teaching materials before worrying about choosing provincial languages, since there is a strong possibility that most of the latter^s will be selected from the present MT₁'s. Since there are many factors, such as language attitudes and political and prestige influences, involved in the choice of a provincial language, this should not precede the introduction of MT₁'s into the school system.

At the present time, research is being done at the University of Yaounde to determine the exact number of Cameroon languages, the eventual provincial language candidates, and the linguistic characteristics of each individual language. However, the most needed information--basic phonological and syntactic data--on many MT₁'s may be found in the previous and current linguistic work. This means that there is a reasonable amount of data to start the work so as to let the people most affected by this planning see actual results in the form of handbooks, guides, etc. From the available data, basic handbooks on MT's can be provided for adult literacy programs as well as for pre-school and early primary school years. Only one such handbook per mother tongue would be necessary and the overall cost would hardly be as high as the cost of the 'Ecole sous l'arbre' materials. In fact, a lot of work on developing such basic teaching materials has been done at the College Liberman, but only on a limited number of languages.

My own little experience in Cameroon literacy programs has convinced me that a one-year program would be enough to help adults read and write in their own languages. Then, self-supported local programs would be responsible for providing additional reading materials in mother tongues, as is the case in the present existing local programs. If a local community could not supply itself with reading materials in its mother tongue, or if such materials were not yet available, then, it would content itself with the materials for a related PL.

It is very important to point out that no particular schools need to be created to carry on the adult literacy programs, since these can be introduced into the existing basic local communities. Basic communities are units which already gather on a regular basis, such as traditional associations and organizations, the basic units of the political party, religious chorales, adult work groups in the rural areas, etc., and which function with the MT's as the only medium of communication. I would suggest that the adult literacy programs be carried out within these basic communities which exist almost everywhere, for a set period of no more than one year. In order to do this, Provincial and Divisional seminars on vernacular languages would focus on training primary school teachers and adult literacy instructors in as many mother tongues as possible.

7. A blue-print for a trilingual education system

From the previous section it should be clear that a Cameroon trilingual education system should aim at helping each Cameroonian student become fluent and literate in his mother tongue or a related provincial language, as well as in the two official languages as he/she works his/her way from primary school to the university. I emphasize the fact that the two conditions of fluency and literacy should be required in order to talk realistically about trilingualism. It is absolutely necessary that the education system provide means for meeting this requirement. I shall now try to show how this policy can be implemented through the present system simultaneously in a top-to-bottom and bottom-up process.

I. Top-to-bottom process

i. At the university level, two things can be done: (a) the expansion of present courses on vernacular languages in order to make them language-learning courses covering all the mother tongues (MT's), as well as potential provincial languages. Measures should be taken to encourage a greater number of students to take courses in the languages related to their own MT, if courses in their own MT are not already offered. Notice that it would take some four weeks to two months only for a university student to become literate in his own language if he were working on his own. This time would be shorter if he first took the necessary background courses, Introduction to Phonology, Morphology, and Syntax, etc., for example.

(b) Some of the students majoring or minoring in linguistics, as a part of their degree requirement, could choose to participate in a vernacular language literacy program. This would necessarily apply to students in such teacher training schools as I.P.A.R. (Institut Pédagogique à vocation Rurale) and the Higher School of Education (E.N.S. - Ecole Normale Supérieure).

ii. At the secondary school level, each secondary school would be required to replace German, Spanish, and Latin courses by vernacular language courses in the appropriate provincial language and closely related important mother tongues. To do this, it would suffice to extend the present private secondary school vernacular language programs to cover all public secondary schools.

Also, some language majors could choose to participate in a vernacular language literacy program. No particular change is needed at this level in the teaching policy of French and English, except where teaching methods are concerned.

iii. At the primary school level, first, teachers should specialize in specific subject matter teaching, including languages, since one teacher can hardly qualify in teaching all that children need to know at a given level.

Here, two levels should be considered, namely the lower level covering at least the first three years, and the upper level starting at least with the fourth year. Trilingualism should operate at each of these levels.

(a) At the lower level of primary school in the rural areas, the mother tongue should be the medium of instruction, and the PL and O-1 subjects of instruction. In the major city areas, PL should be the medium of instruction and at least one MT and O-1, subjects of instruction.

(b) At the upper level of primary school in the rural areas, a gradual switch to O-1 as the medium of instruction should be worked, and the MT and either the PL or O-2 (depending on the school's resources and location) should become subjects of instruction. In the major city areas, the same gradual switch to O-1 as medium of instruction should be made, and the PL and either the MT or O-2 (again depending on the school's situation) should become subjects of instruction. This planning results in the consistent maintenance of one vernacular language, either the MT or PL, throughout each primary school, depending on whether the latter is in a rural or a major city area. It also results in the maintenance of O-1 throughout each primary school. Thus, one is sure that for each student, entrance into secondary school will mark a complete switch to O-1 as the medium of instruction. Then, the learning of O-2 would follow its present course.

Now, how do we start this process immediately in the primary schools? One needs only to use the material and personnel presently available to start vernacular language courses with MT's as the media of instruction in the appropriate major city areas. It is clear that some of these MT's will ultimately be selected as PL's. Provincial and Divisional seminars should prepare teachers for this starting process.

II. Bottom-up process

Looking now at the eventual working of the system as it will function, it is necessary to broaden our view of the notion of education to include, now, adult literacy programs, and, later, the possibility of continuing education for those who are not fortunate enough to enter secondary school or who cannot afford higher education. First, in the regular, formal school system, the student will have--by the end of primary school--reasonable fluency and literacy in a PL and/or MT and in O-1. This is enough to meet his socio-economic language requirements. In addition, depending on where he went to primary school, he would have a reasonable acquaintance with his O-2, and this would help him enroll later in a special program for improving his knowledge of

this language in the event he ever decides he needs to. By the end of secondary school, the Cameroonian student will necessarily become trilingual in the strict sense of this word, as used in this paper.

Turning now to the adults, it should be clear that as they are offered the opportunity of becoming literate in their own MT's, they might be required to offer the same opportunity to their children. This would constitute enough motivation for them to want to participate in local vernacular language programs and to help children meet the MT primary school requirement. In addition, if the adults in each province are offered the opportunity of participating in the selection of PL, they would be more willing to learn it. Once they are involved in the language learning process, there is a greater chance that some of them will be willing to acquire literacy in O-1, depending on their personal interest or job requirements.

8. Some advantages of the proposed system

The recognition of the Cameroon de facto trilingualism and its planning offer many advantages over the prevailing educational system. Before describing some of these advantages, I will point out some difficulties that the proposed system would still have to face.

Language is a very sensitive matter. One should not forget that no matter what kind of planning one proposes in a country such as Cameroon, someone, somewhere will be frustrated. It is possible that the democratic process of selecting the PL's might encounter some ill-feelings somewhere. Also, children and parents whose MT's are chosen as PL's might feel superiority over the speakers of related MT's. Another difficulty is that many children might end up pursuing a quadrilingual program. The important consideration seems to be the necessity of seeing to it that as few people as possible feel 'threatened' by the country's language policy; that those who do learn more languages than three (by reason of their geographic location or personal wish) will benefit in some way. There might be some unexpected difficulties, as should be expected from the solution of any human problem, but these would have to be solved as the details of implementation make them apparent in actual situations.

The first advantage is that it will help the school children avoid the present effect of their second language deficiencies. The present system, starting out with French and/or English as the medium of instruction, does not make the difference between children's ability to learn other school subject matters, such as arithmetic, history, geography, science, etc., and their ability to learn the foreign languages to which they are exposed. In fact, their deficiencies in the medium of instruction are carried over to all the other school subjects. In the proposed system, it would be possible to eradicate this difficulty. One way of doing this would consist of using in foreign language courses only those textbooks the content of which would already have been mastered in the previous school year(s). This process can be kept throughout

the primary school, or at least until the children have demonstrated their ability in learning new concepts in a foreign language. Such ability would indicate that the switch of the medium of instruction could take place. Appropriate tests for this would be devised and administered on a yearly basis after the first three years of primary school.

The second advantage of the proposed system has to do with standardization processes. All Cameroon provincial languages (to be) will have to undergo some kind of standardization. This means that the standardization efforts would be concentrated on the PL's and the results of these efforts would then help with the development of related MT's.

A third advantage is the greater guarantee of authentic cultural development. In Africa, the family is the main source of cultural and moral values, and the MT is the key to those values. There is no reason for planning a linguistic levelling of our country or, worse, for hoping that some of the languages will soon die out (which has not yet been proven). By linking the adult literacy programs with children's pre- and early-school years literacy in MT's and/or related PL's, we insure a continuous transmission and development of the authentic cultural and moral values of our country.

The fourth advantage of the trilingual education system is an economic advantage. It allows the language policy of the country to parallel its economic pattern. The people responsible for the bulk of our present national income are the illiterate peasants in the rural area, and the prospects of increase of their number (through the ruralization of primary school) are fairly high. The only way to help them develop the necessary know-how, for at least the agricultural development of the country, is through the use of their own languages. Moreover, the classroom is not the only place where the necessary technical know-how needed for agricultural development can be developed. There are also the (extended) families and the basic local communities which should be offered the possibility of actively participating in this development process. Vernacular languages are the cheapest and the most effective means for achieving this goal.

A fifth advantage of the proposed system is rather an hypothesis which I refer to as a simplification hypothesis. The idea is that a system which puts emphasis on the use of vernacular languages would result in the reduction of the number of years of both primary and secondary school education. The hypothesis is based on the observation by many people that those students who start primary school with their MT's as the medium of instruction learn other school subject matter faster than those who start with a foreign language as the medium. The reason is that the use of MT prevents the language deficiency multiplier effect. Thus, it is reasonable to hypothesize that with the introduction of MT's in the primary school system, children will be able to learn in, at most, six years what they are now expected to learn in seven years. The same hypothesis is reasonable for the secondary school system. Notice that such an hypothesis, if it is seriously considered within the present framework of the reformation of our curriculum, would mean

more education for more students on essentially the same educational budget.

The final and perhaps most important advantage of the trilingual system is that it contributes to the building up of national unity. I will not analyze this point in detail here because I am currently involved in preparing such an analysis. However, the main points are, first, that language planning should offer some means of maintaining and fostering national unity. This is a sine qua non condition for the acceptability of any proposed plan. Secondly, that in a multilingual country like Cameroon, languages can play a unifying role at the national level if they already play this role at the provincial and local levels, and this is what was implicit in the trilingual system proposed in this paper.

9. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to show that the introduction of Cameroon vernacular languages into the school system will result in a trilingual education system which is highly beneficial to the country. I have argued that, in order to implement this policy, the Government should aim at providing basic handbooks on each language. But, the present MT₁'s should be introduced into the school system and adult literacy programs right away. I should emphasize the fact that the need for basic handbooks on each African language is important in any African country, for many linguistic, educational, anthropological, and religious purposes.

Turning now to the need for communication at the African regional and continental levels, it is necessary to notice the importance of the role that Cameroon may eventually play. Five languages are commonly used for communication at the continental level. These are Arabic, English, French, Hausa, and Swahili. Among these, four are strongly rooted in Cameroon; namely, Arabic, English, French, and Hausa. As a result, it appears that in order for Cameroon to solve its linguistic problems, it will have to build institutions which have a Pan-African orientation. One way of doing this would be to develop African language courses at the University of Yaounde, with provisions for teaching major African languages such as Arabic, Hausa, and Swahili. Another way would be to cooperate with its neighboring countries in vernacular language teacher training, alphabet harmonization, and instructional materials development.

Footnote

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